



## 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

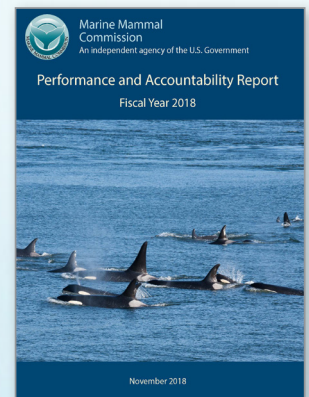
### About Us

We are a federal agency charged under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act \(MMPA\)](#) to provide comprehensive oversight of science, policy, and management actions affecting marine mammals and their ecosystems. Marine mammals are essential to the health and productivity of the world's oceans and some freshwater habitats.

**Legal and Policy Oversight:** As an independent U.S. government agency with oversight authority, we provide timely, science-based reviews of proposed actions by federal agencies and other entities, and recommend measures to minimize human impacts on marine mammals and their habitats. We seek to promote and develop practical, cost-effective ways to advance science-based conservation and resolve management issues pertinent to marine mammals. In 2018, the Commission submitted [over one hundred letters](#) to federal agencies and various action proponents, providing specific comments and recommendations aimed at enhancing marine mammal conservation and promoting adherence to the MMPA and [other applicable laws](#). Please learn more about [our reports and letters on our website](#).

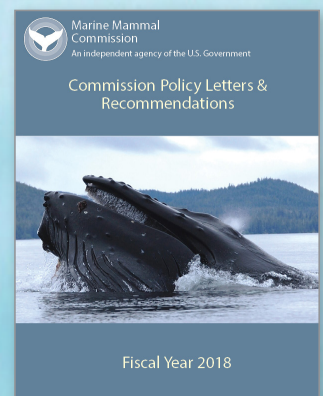
**Community & Stakeholder Engagement:** We facilitate cooperation and communication among a wide range of stakeholders involved in marine mammal science, conservation, and ocean resource use. Our [2018 Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington](#), provided a forum for federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), members of academia, industry, and the public to engage in discussions about marine mammal issues important to the Pacific Northwest and Alaska regions. Our ongoing [review of the co-management of marine mammals](#) that have nutritional and cultural importance to Alaska Native communities aims to provide guidance on strengthening co-management of marine mammals between federal agencies and Alaska Native Organizations (ANOs) under section 119 of the MMPA. Throughout 2018, we organized briefings for Congressional offices, federal agencies, and NGOs with the goal of encouraging partnerships and building understanding of complex marine mammal conservation challenges such as those involving [Southern Resident killer whales](#) and [North Atlantic right whales](#).

### Reports



Review our FY2018 [Performance and Accountability Report](#) for an overview of our accomplishments.

### Letters



Read our [science & policy recommendations](#) in this year's 124 oversight letters.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2018

**Reducing Marine Mammal Bycatch Globally:** Bycatch in fisheries is recognized as the leading threat to marine mammals worldwide, with hundreds of thousands animals killed incidentally each year by fishing gear. We address global marine mammal bycatch at multiple levels through our [policy work](#), our [grants program](#), and our participation in efforts to protect marine mammals such as North Atlantic right whales, vaquitas, and [false killer whales](#). In 2018, we worked with stakeholders addressing bycatch of large whales in lobster and crab pot fisheries, participated in all seven extant [Take Reduction Teams \(TRTs\)](#) established by the National Marine Fisheries Service, and organized a [workshop on novel approaches to bycatch reduction](#). We also provided input to a newly formed [modeling group](#) tasked with developing protocols to estimate marine mammal bycatch in foreign fisheries to assess compliance with comparability requirements for imports of seafood products under the MMPA.



Learn more about our work on [North Atlantic right whales](#)



Learn more about our work on [Southern Resident killer whales](#)

**Supporting Marine Mammal Research and Collaboration:** Our [Grants and Research program](#), though small, fills an important and unique niche in marine mammal research. We generally fund novel, low-cost, small-scale projects designed to catalyze further work. In 2018, we funded [five projects](#) directed at community-driven conservation approaches to address threats to marine mammals, including Southern Resident killer whales, [Mediterranean monk seals](#), and large whales on the U.S. West Coast. We supported participation at meetings of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission by an expert in bycatch assessment to highlight the issue of cetacean bycatch with the goal of reducing bycatch of marine mammal populations in that region. The Commission also provided funding for students to present their research findings at multiple international conferences.

**International Conservation:** The Commission supports and participates in many international marine mammal conservation efforts to further the goals of the MMPA. In 2018, Commissioner Tillman chaired the International Whaling Commission (IWC) [Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Working Group](#) and served on the U.S. Delegation to the [IWC67 meeting](#). Our Executive Director co-led an IWC Scientific Committee [workshop on small cetaceans of South America](#). Commission Chair Boness served on the U.S. delegation to the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral agreement on Chukchi Sea polar bears. The Commission continues to play a key role in the international efforts to conserve the [vaquita](#), a small porpoise endemic to the Gulf of California, Mexico, currently the world's most endangered marine mammal, and freshwater cetaceans in the rivers of Asia. We also sponsored four freshwater dolphin researchers from WWF-Cambodia to engage with scientists at the Sarasota Dolphin Research Program with the goal of strengthening conservation approaches and assessment of Mekong River dolphins in Cambodia.



Learn more about our work on [vaquitas](#)



An Annual Meeting focal topic: [recovering pinniped populations](#)

**Emphasizing Science-Based Decision Making:** The Commission is committed to ensuring science is an integral part of decisions made under the MMPA and related statutes. In 2018, we promoted studies to further our understanding of the potential effects of oil and gas activities on marine mammals and facilitated efforts to address information needs related to [energy development](#). We sought to increase research on recovering pinniped populations on both the east and west coasts of the U.S. and on management actions needed to address potential conflicts with fisheries. In partnership with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, we continued to support research on [grey seal prey consumption and potential conflicts](#) with Northeast fisheries. [Predation on salmon by pinnipeds](#) in the Pacific Northwest was a focal topic at our Annual Meeting and helped shape advice provided to Congressional offices and state policy makers as they considered legislation and funding to address these conflicts.